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Analysing the national and institutional policy landscape for foreign academics in Thailand: Opportunity, ambivalence and threat

Authors:
James Burford[ab]*, Thornchanok Uerpairojkit[ac], Mary Eppolite[a], Tittaphan Vachananda[a]

[a] Thammasat University, Thailand
[b] La Trobe University, Australia
[c] King's College London, UK

*Corresponding author**

Dr James Burford
Lecturer
Graduate Research School
La Trobe University
Bundoora VIC 3086
Australia
j.burford@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract

While academic expatriation is a longstanding global phenomenon, Thailand has emerged in recent years as an increasingly popular destination for internationally mobile academics. Currently, there is a gap in the literature assessing policy initiatives seeking to attract expatriate academics to developing higher education systems in the Global South. The objective of this article is to address this gap by identifying and analysing current policy dispositions toward foreign academics at the national and institutional levels in Thailand, as an example case. The article finds that within Thai higher education policy discourse, foreign academics are framed in three primary ways: as opportunities, as absent or unimportant, and as threats to the Thai nation. While foreign academics are often cast as experts who might accelerate the economic development of the nation and enhance the global competitiveness of the Thai higher education sector, they may also be presented as threats to Thai culture, values and security. However, the most prevalent disposition traced across the policy texts surveyed in this study was one of absence and marginality, suggesting a high degree of ambivalence toward foreign academics in the country. The article concludes with implications for future researchers and Thailand's education policymakers to consider.

Introduction and literature review

The rise of the knowledge-based economy has transformed the ways in which higher education systems function worldwide. Today's universities have been recast as institutions that are vital for the success of the nation within the global economy (Altbach & Knight, 2007), and international higher education itself is increasingly positioned as a 'lucrative business' (Chan & Ng, 2008, p. 291). In response to these changes, institutions and governments alike have sought to increase their competitiveness in the global higher education marketplace. Transnational academic mobility is one of the various strategies that nations have pursued in order to coordinate and accelerate higher education development (Kim, 2017). For policymakers, the recruitment of foreign academics is variously framed as 'brain competition policy' or 'innovation policy' (Reiner, 2010), set within wider discourses of international 'talent wars' (Fahey & Kenway, 2010). Across these debates, academic expatriation is typically connected to a host of aspirations such as enhancing national innovation and creating jobs, preparing learners for a globalised future, boosting publication and internationalisation metrics, and enabling institutions to climb in league tables.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, increasing interest among policymakers has given rise to a large body of international scholarship on academic expatriation. Researchers have established the significance of foreign academics, or what are sometimes termed 'international academics', 'foreign faculty' and 'expatriate academics', as an area of inquiry (Trembath, 2016). They have traced broad patterns across contexts and identified the particular challenges that foreign academics tend to experience as they migrate (Selmer, Trembath & Lauring, 2017). There has also been growing interest in investigating both national and institutional policies relating to international faculty (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017). Across these debates it has become clear that academic mobility strategies and the reception of academic migrants are highly variable globally. For example, within the European Union (EU) there have been efforts to develop a regional academic mobility program. The EU's current policy discourse with regard to academic mobility is oriented toward political and economic integration via the circulation of human capital, or 'a set of ideas that seek to promote a sense of European-ness' through mobility' (Fahey & Kenway, 2010, p. 569). It is also a policy discourse that configures an internationalised academic labour market as important for enhancing regional economic prosperity, and positions Europe as competing with other regions such as North America and China for available talent.

Within Asia, the desire to develop 'world-class, research-intensive universities' (Paul & Long, 2016, p. 130), has led to the adoption of various human capital strategies. For example, a number of national initiatives have been launched in the region, ranging from the Brain Korea 21 and the World Class University (WCU) Projects in South Korea; the Centre of Excellence (COE) and the Super Global Universities Projects in Japan; and Project 211, Project 985 and the 1,000 Talent Plan in China (Kim, 2017). The various strategies pursued by these Asian nations relate to both the level of development of a given higher education system, and whether or not the nation is predominantly English-speaking (Shin & Kehm, 2013). Smaller economies that use English as their academic

language, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, have tended to enhance their research productivity by attracting highly productive foreign academics, who may already have experience and networks from other established higher education systems. Indeed, recent reports have identified that some universities in Hong Kong and Singapore aim to hire approximately half of their faculty on the international market (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017). In order to attract talented researchers from abroad, some Asian nations and institutions have reformed arrangements for appointments, promotion and career advancement. Others have offered generous inducements, ranging from high remuneration, generous laboratory space, research assistants, faculty housing, and support for faculty spouses and children. However, the picture in Asia is uneven. While in some places international academics are treated 'as super-professors, earning higher salaries and having extra privileges' (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017, p. 6), in other contexts they may be treated 'as second-class academic citizens—without access to standard appointments, barred from academic governance, and often teaching more than domestic faculty' (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017, p. 6).

While the studies above document the existence of policy approaches toward academic expatriation in Asia, such as Malaysia's, Vietnam's and Singapore's efforts to re-position themselves as regional higher education hubs (Chan & Ng, 2008; Mok, 2007; Welch, 2010) and China's increased government support for international faculty recruitment (Kim, 2015), the extent to which similar practices occur in Thailand is largely undocumented. The limited consideration of academic mobility to Thailand is curious, especially given that there are a number of contextual factors suggesting that academic expatriation may be a growing area of importance. For example, Thailand's expenditure on Research and Development has seen steady growth, from 0.235 percent in 2009 to 0.627 percent in 2015 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). Given this fact, one might expect that opportunities abound for highly qualified expatriates, including academics, to migrate to the country. There is some evidence that this may be occurring, with recent data released by the Department of Employment finding that educational expatriation to Thailand has grown by 66.3 percent in the past eight years (Department of Employment, 2018). Other demand-side factors for expatriation include the growing demand among middle class families for 'international' educational opportunities for their children (Rhein, 2016), 'international' in this context is a term which often signifies high cost, English-medium instruction, and connotes high social prestige (Burford, Koompraphant & Jirathanpiwat, 2018). Additionally, there is a need for Thailand to embrace international knowledge and skills in order to improve the country's economic prosperity. In light of this policy context, this article seeks to explore the current status and impact of policies surrounding expatriate academics to Thailand by answering the following research questions: 1) what policy initiatives, at the national and institutional levels, address inward academic mobility to Thailand? And, 2) how do Thai policymakers at the national and institutional levels currently position foreign academics?

In the sections that follow we answer these questions by analysing a series of national and institutional policy texts related to foreign academics working in Thailand. Through a thematic analysis of these texts we identify three key dispositions that characterise Thai policymakers' approaches to foreign academics: opportunity, threat and ambivalence. By

offering these framings we illuminate the complex and contested space that foreign academics occupy in the country. While Thai policymakers have followed global trends by embracing internationalisation as a policy discourse (Lao, 2015), our review finds that non-Thai academics are not only framed as opportunities for the nation; they are also viewed as possible threats, and to a large extent are absent from (or marginal within) higher education policy debates, particularly at the national level.

Thai higher education and the discourse of internationalisation

In order to understand the current policy framings of foreign academics in Thailand, it is useful to review the development of internationalisation as a discourse in Thai higher education. The origins of international influence in higher education in Siam (the pre-1939 name of the country now called Thailand) may be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century and the political and economic impacts of European imperialism (Rhein, 2016). As Rhein (2016) argues, in order to act defensively against both British and French imperial ambitions, 'attempts were made to promote the economic, educational, social and cultural sovereignty through the modernization of the Thai state elite' (p. 262). A significant part of this project involved modernising its education system in order to 'reposition the nation as a civilized land unsuitable for colonisation' (Rhein, 2016, p. 262).

A number of recent studies have offered excellent historical accounts of the development of Siam's higher education system, and the role and influence of 'the international' therein (Lao, 2015; Lao & Hill, 2017; Rhein, 2016). Thai higher education was initiated and designed based largely on Western influences caused by imperialism and the threat of colonisation (Lao & Hill, 2017). By the 1950s this continued, with an increased emphasis from the United States due to the threat of communism in Southeast Asia, the Vietnam War, and the foreign investment that flowed into Thailand during this period.

From the 1980s and 1990s the concept of internationalisation expanded, and continued to shape Thai higher education. During this period the idea of internationalisation shifted from a defensive tactic to an economic one. By the 1980s, a gradual deregulation of public universities was introduced and universities were permitted to open 'full-fee programs' in order to extend their profitability (Burford & Mulya, 2018). The first 15-year plan on higher education in Thailand (1990-2004) included key buzzwords of the time such as 'internationalisation', 'economic competitiveness' and 'international-level competence' (Rhein, 2016). According to Lao and Hill (2017), this was the first time that the term 'internationalisation of higher education' entered Thailand's policy discourse. Further Higher Education National Development Plans (e.g. the 7th and 8th) continued to identify internationalisation and regionalisation as core national objectives.

Internationalisation remains a policy implication of the current National Education Plan (NEP). Written by the Ministry of Education, the NEP sets out the areas and directions of Thailand's education reform to inform national, local and institutional policymaking. The current NEP (2017-2036) has four main goals: (1) to develop an efficient and quality education system; (2) to make Thais 'good citizens' as defined by the Constitution and

the 20-year National Strategy; (3) to make Thailand a learning society, upholding national morals and the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy; and (4) to drive Thailand out of the middle income trap (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 79). One of the key policy implications of the current NEP has been the expansion of opportunities for Thailand to cooperate with foreign academic institutions (Ministry of Education, 2017), measuring success by the number of institutions offering a dual degree program with a foreign institution. The NEP anticipates this to increase from two in 2017 to ten by 2027.

Across this section we have identified that the West has been a longstanding part of the development of higher education in Thailand, sometimes under the threat of force. Foreign ideas, practices and instructors have influenced higher education institutions in Thailand since their origins in the late 1880s, and elements of these continue to shape the structures and operations of institutions today. At the same time, while Thailand has a particular history with regard to internationalisation, it is also now embedded in a global milieu where educational ideas, policies, curricula and human capital are all on the move. Having now outlined in the broad context of internationalisation in Thailand, in the next section we outline the methodology employed in this article.

Methodology

As we began this project we quickly realised that policy texts relating to foreign academics in Thailand are highly dispersed. As a result, the methodology we have employed in this review is broad in its orientation, seeking to survey a variety of national policy texts that relate to the higher education sector, as well as wide searches of Thai university and news media websites. All of the texts we analyse are available to the general public, and were published in either Thai or English. The timeframe of the initial search was set between the years 2009-2018. We selected this particular time frame in order to include a range of potential policies produced during the Abhisit (Democrat Party), Yingluck (Pheu Thai Party) and Prayut administrations (National Council for Peace and Order). We decided not to search back further than this period because the three immediately prior administrations each governed for less than a year, and our assumption was that this limited time frame might not enable us to observe significant policy impact.

The searches for relevant policy texts were conducted between October 2017 and March 2018. The guiding aims for the analysis were to: 1) identify texts that directly or indirectly impact on the recruitment and working experience of foreign academics in Thailand, and 2) to understand how these texts ‘position’ foreign academics vis-à-vis the Thai nation. Between March and June 2018 a draft analysis was written and extended by all of the authors.

With regard to the analytic approach used in this study, a practice of close reading was initially applied. The analysts read and reread the texts in order to discern potential meanings, and noted these meanings down. After reading the texts several times, the authors began to name broad discourses in the policy texts relevant to the position of foreign academics in Thai policy. Following further analysis and discussion with the research team, we began to search for the ways in which foreign academics might be

broadly positioned within Thai policy texts. We subsequently reduced the analytic categories to two key discourses: *foreign academics as threat* and *foreign academics as opportunity*. Following further analysis a third theme was identified: *policy ambivalence toward foreign academics*. These three themes are explored in the following sections.

Foreign academics as opportunities for Thailand

The first policy disposition we identified at both the national and institutional levels was a tendency to position foreign academics as opportunities for development. In this section we argue that the arrival of foreign academics to Thailand can be framed as an opportunity to improve Thailand's global economic position and the quality and prestige of its higher education sector.

One of the core economic policies of the 2014-2019 Prayut administration is 'Thailand 4.0', a comprehensive economic model which aims to shift Thailand toward a value-based creative economy. Thailand 4.0 focuses on ten targeted industries. Five of these are existing industrial sectors with growth potential realised by adding value through advanced technologies: Next-Generation Automotive; Smart Electronics; High-Income Tourism and Medical Tourism; Efficient Agriculture and Biotechnology; and Food Innovation. The other five sectors are 'the growth engines to accelerate Thailand's future growth': Automation and Robotics; Aerospace; Bio-Energy and Bio-chemicals; Digital; and Medical and Healthcare (Thailand Board of Investment, 2017). These ten targeted industries are known as S-Curve 10. By focusing heavily on innovation and technology via these targeted industries, it aims to shift the country's workforce, from a reliance on low-income labour-intensive agriculture and light and heavy industries, toward knowledge-based industries. In accordance with the NEP, one of the objectives of Thailand 4.0 is to:

> Raise Thailand's Human Development Index (HDI) from 0.722 to 0.8 or the top 50 countries within 10 years, [and] ensure that at least five Thai universities are ranked amongst the world's top 100 higher education institution within 20 years (Ministry of Commerce, 2015).

The NEP constructs a national policy discourse that regards universities as intrinsically linked to national development. As such, Thailand 4.0 has established a particular platform for recognising the potential of foreign academics in contributing to knowledge and creative industries. The NEP has also suggested revision to laws and regulations surrounding the employment of foreign academics, to better facilitate the employment of those with expertise that is 'in high demand and align[s] with the nation's development direction' (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 100).

Increasingly, the ratio of foreign academics employed in an institution has also become a performance indicator for universities seeking to climb in league tables. As many Thai universities compete for prestige both domestically and internationally, it is valuable to examine their attempts at internationalising via foreign academic employment. For example, Silpakorn University (SU) launched an action plan to improve its Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) 'star rating' by increasing the number of its foreign faculty members,

establishing an international office, and improving campus facilities to welcome foreign staff. SU budgeted 45 million baht (approx. US$1.3 million) to implement this plan, in addition to another 11 million baht (approx. US$335,000) for a number of activities aimed at attracting foreign academics, such as international programmes, conferences and training in art and design, to boost its international reputation (Silpakorn University, 2017). Likewise, Srinakharinwirot University (SWU) has introduced a long-term internationalisation plan. At the time of writing, SWU is in the process of expanding its international programs and dual degrees so that it can recruit more foreign academics. SWU has also set a goal to increase the number of visiting scholars and fellowships by 30 percent by 2024 (Srinakharinwirot University, 2011). SWU also granted a considerable number of scholarships to incentivise foreign academics to work for the university on a temporary basis. Not only does it expect knowledge transfer from foreign academics by connecting their students with internationally experienced researchers; SWU also hopes to increase its number of international publications—another key criterion of higher education performance metrics.

Across our review of institutional policies we noted a tendency for foreign academics to be framed as opportunity. For example, the rector of Thammasat University (TU), Gasinee Witoonchart, stated that TU must emphasise its internationality, 'so that our students can learn from international platforms to push forward the progress on their academics' (Matichon, 2017). In 2017, TU launched a five-year strategic plan, which aims to promote the employment of foreign academics. While in 2017, full-time foreign faculty members accounted for 8.4 percent of the total academic workforce, TU plans to expand this number to 14 percent by 2022 (Thammasat University, 2017).

TU's proportion of foreign academics is significantly higher than other universities outside Bangkok, such as Khon Kaen University (KKU) in the Northeast of the country, where foreign academics account for only 2.23 percent of the workforce (Khon Kaen University, 2015). In order to increase the proportion of foreign academic employees, KKU is promoting collaborative projects with foreign universities. Recognising that inefficiency in human resources management creates difficulties in recruitment and retention of foreign academic employees, the university has also embarked on an administrative reform. By 2019, KKU aims to increase the minimum number of foreign faculty members to 25 per year, and of visiting scholars and post-doctoral researchers to 40 per year (Khon Kaen University, 2015).

In sum, Thai policymakers appear to welcome foreign academics, particularly those whose expertise is in alignment with the country's national development priorities. Thailand 4.0 serves as an umbrella policy framework that allows other policies to be supported by the government, including education initiatives to transfer technology from abroad. Academic migrants are increasingly seen as a useful resource to help Thailand realise its aspiration to become a high-value innovative economy. Nevertheless, it is higher education institutions who are the key stakeholders in attending closely to the opportunities of foreign academics, with the presence of international expertise being near ubiquitous in university plans and strategy.

Foreign academics as threats to Thailand

Although the entry of foreign academics into Thailand may be viewed by national and institutional policymakers as a positive opportunity for economic development, another trend we observed was a tendency to see foreign academics as a threat to the Thai nation. Much of the scepticism surrounding foreign academics stems from a belief that some foreign ideas and philosophies are not aligned with Thai values and traditions.

Internationalisation has been identified as the root cause of many social ills in Thailand, from increasing greed and selfishness to a deteriorating sense of community (Chaipattana Foundation, 2017). Critics argue that Western values in particular are at odds with 'Thainess', leading to fears of cultural degradation (Thanaphonphan, 2008; Posrithong, 2013), and prompting actions to protect Thai morality from external influence (Rhein, 2016). Additionally, from an economic point of view, 'foreign meddling' was blamed for the 1997 Financial Crisis, which led the Thai government to temporarily retreat from the process of internationalisation (Rhein, 2016).

If we closely examine the NEP, we may recognise a cautiousness about the side effects of encouraging contact with external sources of knowledge and culture. The document states that Thai youth are increasingly embracing foreign values, which has resulted in a cultural shift, making them more 'self-centered, impatient, materialistic, and undisciplined' (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 71). According to the Ministry of Education, this poses a threat to the stability of Thai culture; the growing inflow of foreign—predominantly Western—culture has negatively influenced Thai society. The risk of 'losing' national characteristics has become an argument for central authorities to act as protectors of Thai values. According to Rhein (2016), this response is not new: 'there have long been calls for balancing the forces of internationalization with localization and the need to protect the local from the pressures of the international' (Rhein, 2016, p. 266). As a result, the Ministry of Education has taken on the responsibility of designing curricula and regulating educational institutions to preserve and reproduce 'Thainess'.

The current government has also attempted to caution Thai people of Western liberalism in order to legitimise its military intervention, and nationalist agendas have been heavily promoted amongst students. For example, in July 2014, Prime Minister Prayut established the '12 core values' as the moral compass for Thais, which include the conservation of Thai tradition. The Ministry of Education subsequently integrated these values into the mandatory curriculum from Prathom 1 (Grade 1) to Mathayom 6 (Grade 12) (Pundit, 2014). In January 2018, the Ministry of Education announced that it was planning to devise a 'merit test' to measure high school students' awareness of the core values, their social responsibility and the duties of Thais (Lertbumrungchai, 2018).

While making Thai students less susceptible to 'foreign' influence is important, so is educating foreign teachers about 'Thai' cultural beliefs. As a result, the Ministry of Education also created a 40-hour Thai Culture and Ethics course, which aims to increase middle- and high-school foreign teachers' understandings of Thainess so that they can act in accordance with the government's view of Thai beliefs (Pundit, 2014). While this

course has not yet been applied at the higher education level, the underlying educational discourse it presents is one where foreign instructors risk bringing challenging ideas into Thai educational institutions.

This is further clarified by comments made by the Thai Prime Minister in February 2018, where he advised Thai educators that the most important foundation for learning is morality, and that conflicting ideas could cause 'contamination'. He also argued that pro-democracy university student activists, who called for a return to democracy, are so consumed by Western ideas that 'they forget that these ideas also led to bloody conflicts with countless deaths before achieving anything' (Songsakul, 2018, n.p.). He later added that, because Thailand values 'peace' and thus cannot borrow Western liberal values, it is the responsibility of instructors to instil morals that are suitable for Thailand. When considering his position in setting policy direction, this sketch illuminates the role academics play in the life of the nation, as well as the lines they ought not cross. From the Thai government's perspective, any instructor who teaches students 'foreign (Western) values' may thus be considered a threat to the country's harmony. This clearly has implications for foreign academics, who may bring with them other kinds of knowledge, beliefs and critical practices.

The perception of foreigners as a threat also exists at the institutional level, even at Thailand's oldest university, Chulalongkorn (CU). A recent example demonstrated the ways that Western liberal values may be positioned as at odds with Thai traditions. On August 3, 2017, three students walked out of the annual solemn oath-taking ceremony held in front of the statues of King Rama V and VI. In this ceremony, students are expected to prostrate themselves to show respect to the royal founders of the University. A university administrator attempted to control the situation by headlocking a student with one arm and dragging him away (The Nation, 2017). After receiving widespread criticism, both domestically and globally, CU released the following statement:

> While we understand that news media have freedom of speech, we also ask that journalists be accurate, unbiased, and fair to our situation. […] Our university has a long history and a royal lineage that are imbued in our tradition and beliefs that may be uncommon to western liberal values. Much that we support liberalism and freedom of expression, we also have our cultural roots and harmony to balance (Chulalongkorn University, 2017, n.p.).

This statement demonstrates the ways that foreign ideas can be positioned as threats within Thai universities. However, this action is at odds with the cosmopolitan values that are often espoused with regard to international higher education (Ferguson, 2018). Many supporters of education identify its goal as promoting a multicultural environment where students can develop the dispositions of global citizenship (Tran & Nguyen, 2015). It may also be noted that this position coexists with CUs 'global benchmarking' strategy, which aims to increase its employment of foreign academics by 40 percent over two years (Chulalongkorn University, 2016). While the opportunities of foreign academics are clearly identified by CU in setting this target, it is also important to consider the

reception of the epistemologies and values, knowledge projects and pedagogies, that foreign academics may bring with them when they come to work.

While the first policy disposition we identified in this article was 'foreign academics as opportunity', this second disposition configures foreign knowledge and values—and by extension those who promote them—as threats to the stability of Thailand and the reproduction of its culture through education. Given the current undemocratic circumstances in Thailand, including press censorship and the arrests of academics who have spoken out about sensitive issues, it could be argued that all academics—including foreigners—are positioned as possible risks to the state. Foreign academics in particular are expected to demonstrate respect by not unsettling 'traditional' Thai values. In the next section we outline the most significant policy disposition with regard to foreign academics: ambivalence.

Foreign academics and policy ambivalence in Thailand

When analysing policy it is important to explore not only what is present in texts, but also what may be absent from or marginal within them (Ozga, 2000). We have found that the most prevalent way foreign academics were positioned in Thai education policy discourse was by absence and ambivalence. While discussion of foreign academics was clear across the institutional documents we reviewed, at the national level the picture regarding foreign academics is very blurry indeed. While some of Thailand's neighbours have embraced strategies of hiring foreign academics to boost the competitiveness of their higher education sectors (Mok, 2007), successive Thai governments have not appeared to position foreign academics as a policy priority in the reform and development of Thai universities.

We are not the first scholars to notice a national policy landscape nearly absent of discussions about foreign academics. As Hoy (2009) notes, little is known about foreign academics working in Thailand. This is also reflected in national policies where foreign academics are 'conspicuous by their absence' (Ibid, p. 1). Hoy (2009) closely examined the *National Education Reform Act* (1999) as well as a Ministry of Education document *Road map and measures for expediting education reform in Thailand* (2005). In Section 52 of the National Education Reform Act, which focuses on the place of teachers in the education system, it states:

> The Ministry shall promote development of a system for teachers and educational personnel, including production and further refinement of this category of personnel, so that teaching will be further enhanced and become a highly respected profession.

However, later in this document Hoy (2009) notes that the reference is to Thai teachers only: 'in talking about the need for educational reform, the document several times calls on 'all Thai people' to pursue this aim and ends with a reference to the 'Thai identity cherished by all'' (p. 2). While Hoy (2009) notes that problematising the exclusion of foreign academics in the context of the Thai Education Reform Act might appear 'churlish', he advocates for a conception of education 'as giving benefits and placing

obligations upon all who participate in it—students, teachers, administrators and the society at large—and this needs to include foreign teachers' (p. 2).

Rather than tracking the positive or negative education policy dispositions, our strongest finding is that there is little to be found about foreign academics and their place and role in Thai higher education. Absence is, by far, the strongest way that foreign academics are configured in the policies we analysed. For example, our research team searched across the current National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Official Statement from the current Minister of Education when he first took office, and Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy. None of these documents mentioned foreign academics, although all of them did discuss human resources development, and the need for Thai young people to be globally competitive. Most institutional policies tend to mention foreign academics in passing. Institutional texts we surveyed tended to write about increasing international programs, climbing global university rankings, and preparing students to be able to speak English, rather than considering the kinds of policies that might be needed to attract, support and retain academic expatriates. When institutional policies did discuss foreign academics, this most often came as a figure to indicate the internationalisation benchmark (e.g. having 20 percent of staff members as foreign academics in five years' time). The quality and qualifications of the foreign academics they employ were also seldom mentioned.

In general, in conducting this review we found much more about foreign academics in university policies, and at best, allusions to them, in the national policies we reviewed. In the conclusion that follows we discuss the implications that follow from these findings.

Conclusion: What to do with foreign academics in Thailand?

In this article we have argued that the policy discourse surrounding foreign academics in Thailand is complex, and does not only view them as opportunities in line with the promises of internationalisation. Instead, we have found that there are multiple dispositions in circulation surrounding foreign academics in Thai educational policy. While foreign academics may be appreciated, particularly if they complement national development priorities, they are also expected to avoid sensitive cultural issues, and respect Thai social norms around national harmony and orderliness. This is compounded by a policy environment—particularly at the national level—that is mostly ambivalent, rarely focused on attracting global scholars to the country. While foreign academics are positioned as both opportunities and threats across a variety of Thai policy texts, the strongest finding emerging from this review was that Thai policymakers mostly do not explicitly consider foreigners working in Thai universities. Our research suggests that unlike its neighbours (Mok, 2007), successive Thai governments have not focussed on creating structures and environments that might attract and retain foreign academics.

If Thailand wishes to further engage in higher education internationalisation it may need to consider specific policies to attract and retain foreign academics. Thai policymakers may wish to consider possible incentives and support systems that could be established, as well as how the wider education system coheres around this issue. At present, it is difficult to discern any particular strategy that the government might have. Further debate

is needed to understand the complexities surrounding the benefits of employing academics from overseas, and benefiting from their knowledge and networks while also ensuring that indigenous Thai culture and values are encouraged and protected. Furthermore, if Thailand wishes to take full advantage of foreign academics it does recruit, then conversations may need to intensify at the institutional level, where the visions and goals of internationalisation are realised and enacted.

This article has made three key contributions to the existing literature on academic expatriation and higher education internationalisation. Firstly, we have addressed a gap in the literature with regard to academic expatriation to Thailand, a national context that has been under-considered to date. Not only is there a paucity of research on academic expatriation to Thailand in particular, this article has also sought to address a broader shortage of accounts regarding academic expatriation to developing higher education systems in the Global South. Secondly, this article has made the case for highly contextualised analyses of national contexts with regard to higher education development policies. We have demonstrated the benefit of analysing national policies within the context of the underlying cultural, historical, and economic motives that inform them. We suggest that without taking these factors into consideration, policy critiques may fail to achieve their intended result. The third contribution this article has made is methodological. We have extended Ozga's (2000) argument that educational policy analysis ought to consider both presences and absences in policy texts. The thematic framework employed above expands on the typical discourse of foreign academics as opportunities or threats by adding the dimension of ambivalence. Examining policy by identifying a lack of data, absences or ambiguities can offer insights for future higher education analysis.

We have identified a number of potential areas of future inquiry. While in this article we have identified the structures and systems that exist in the country, a complementary approach would be to research what the subjects of these policies have experienced and what their understandings of these policies are. This would enable future researchers to identify enactment gaps in which policy can be improved. In general, more empirical research is required in order to more comprehensively understand perspectives of foreign academics, their managers, their students, and other relevant stakeholders. While this study has taken a more structural lens, in future research case studies of specific institutions would also be a valuable source of insight. Examining specific institutions may enable more textured accounts to be developed about the conditions of work, contracts, salary, workload expectations, as well as how foreign academics are recognised by their colleagues and students, and positioned within the institution. While in this article we have begun the work of examining policy texts and the policy context for academic expatriation to Thailand, it is clear that there remains much to be explored in this area.

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